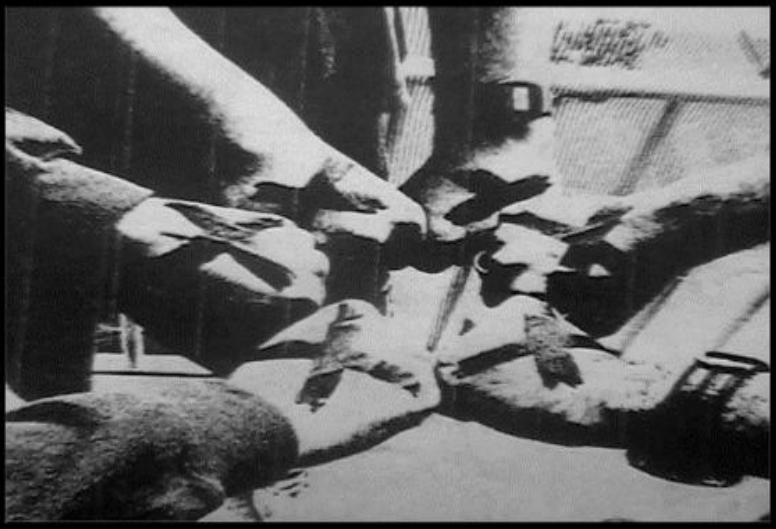
My Edge Is Anything But Straight:



Towards A Radical Queer

Critique Of Intoxication Culture

My Edge Is Anything But Straight: Towards A Radical Queer Critique Of Intoxication Culture

I've been intentionally sober ever since I first started going to punk shows when I was 14 or 15, and have always thought about my sobriety not just as a personal preference but as a social and political statement. I've always felt ambivalent towards sXe identity, though, a major reason being that I also identify strongly as queer. It's not that I think the two identities are necessarily incompatible, but they seem to have an uncomfortable relationship. On the one hand, I haven't felt much space to be my queer self in most punk/hardcore scenes, and the hyper-masculine reputation of sXe definitely turns me off. On the other hand, I've faced a lot of exclusion within queer scenes for my sobriety. With this article I'm attempting to reconcile these parts of myself, wondering how I might hold on to the edge while leaving behind the straight. I hope that it will provoke conversation and debate about drugs, alcohol, queer communities, sXe, radical politics, and about how we can transform our society.

Is sXe sexy? Straightedge, sexuality, and queer identity

"Life's full of conflicts, we'll face / We'll overcome them, thinking straight"
-Youth of Today, "Thinking Straight"

"The song [Out of Step], really, it resonated with a lot of people… Because I think there were a lot of punk rockers who were straight, and who felt like, finally, here is someone who's straight…"
-Ian MacKaye

The initial "formula" laid out by Minor Threat in their song "Out of Step" - "don't drink / don't smoke / don't fuck / at least I can fucking think" - adds sex to drug use and drinking as one of the things that hold kids back from being "straight." As a response to negative trends observed in the punk scene, the song certainly made an important critique by calling out careless and conquest-oriented sexual exploits - often while wasted - as a destructive pattern that brought nothing positive to its participants and served as just another distraction from

the deluded bullshit mainstream reality that political punks ought to be actively resisting rather than just mindlessly perpetuating. To be fair, Ian MacKaye has stated clearly that he never intended his message from "Out of Step" to become another dogma to mindlessly follow - to hear it as such would be completely missing the point. Nonetheless, because of the song's huge influence on what became the sXe scene, it's useful to look critically at those lines and to understand how they relate to queer people.[2] For one, our sexual desires definitely prevent us from being "straight" in a very different sense; a kind of straight that many of us, trapped by self-hatred, desperately want to attain. For queer people attempting to break the shackles of internalized homophobia and shame about our sexuality, any framework that positions sex as something to struggle against is not likely to lead us towards liberation. And of course the unfortunate wording of "straight" edge hardly appeals to queer people right off the bat. Of the three parts of the Out of Step formula, sexual abstinence or restraint has definitely figured far less prominently in most sXer's self-conceptions than abstaining from drugs and alcohol. For the sXers I personally know, sexual ethics have little to do with their sXe identity. From what I've read about other sXe people and scenes, many of the folks who associate sexual restriction with sXe are either Christian or Hare Krishna sXers whose decision to abstain from sex until heterosexual marriage has more to do with God than edge. There are also some who see the sXe contribution to sexual ethics as one of moderation, self-discipline, "waiting for someone special," and chivalrous concepts of hetero masculinity revolving around defending women from the abuses of male heterosexual promiscuity. That's all fine and good, but I have a hard time understanding what directly connects those sexual ethics to abstention from drugs and alcohol; besides, every testimony I've heard or read describes an exclusively

---

[2] A note about words: I use "gay" and "queer" more or less interchangeably in this essay. By "gay" I mean people (men or women, though sometimes with a gay male connotation) who experience primarily or exclusively same-sex desire. By "queer" I'm generally referring to people with dissident sexualities for whom same-sex desire forms a significant part of their experience (including gay, bisexual, pansexual, and other same-gender-loving identities). I use "queer communities" in the plural to acknowledge that there are many different ones; we're not homogenous, we don't all identify with each other, and we can't be made into a single entity. By "homophobia" I mean hatred and fear of queer people by individuals and groups; by "heterosexism" I mean the systematic oppression of queer people rooted in institutions.

heterosexual experience. For me, I know that I couldn't get married to my lover even if I thought marriage wasn't bullshit (which I do). And gender-based models of protection don't translate too well to my experience as a man having sex with men. The particular types of pressure that lead to the kinds of heterosexual activity criticized by some sXe bands bear little relation to the types of intense internalized shame impacting queer sex and intoxication. Gay male sexual culture embraces so-called "casual" or promiscuous sex for a variety of reasons, many problematic and others more politically conscious, but all different from the context of heterosexual conquest that MacKaye and other sXers criticized.

Basically, sXe sexual ethics weren't intended for queer people, straight up. But is sXe homophobic? Of course, some elements of so-called hardline sXe incorporated explicitly homophobic conceptions of sexuality and "natural law" into their ideologies. For example, the "Hardline Manifesto" that came with a Vegan Reich 7-inch single read: "Adherents to the hardline... shall live at one with the laws of nature, and not forsake them for the desire of pleasure - from deviant sexual acts and/or abortion." There is also plenty of anecdotal evidence suggesting that many hardcore scenes, sXe or not, are actively hostile to queer people: every queer sXer I've spoken to has experienced some kind of harassment or shit-talking in their scene. In their song "I Wanna Be A Homosexual," Screeching Weasel (not a sXe band!) pokes fun at homophobia in the sXe scene: "Call me a butt loving fudge packing queer / I don't care cause it's the straight in straight edge / That makes me wanna drink a beer." Some sXe bands such as Slapshot used AIDS as an example of how the lack of discipline associated with not "living straight" could lead to one's downfall. On the other hand, a number of well-known bands including Outspoken and Good Clean Fun made an effort to counter the homophobic elements of hardline sXe by speaking out in favor of gay rights at shows or in lyrics and liner notes. None less than Earth Crisis, toughest of the militant sXe bands, criticized anti-gay laws and violence in their 1996 album *Gomorrah's Season Ends*. They declared that sXe should be a weapon against homophobia and that it is necessary...

> To demonstrate to heterosexuals that gayness is natural and beautiful and that it is not a threat to their existence. To make being openly gay safe and to make the pain of the closet part of a mythical past...

These statements are certainly positive in challenging homophobic norms. But the way they're phrased indicate that they are a response to a widespread problem within the sXe scene. Furthermore, they are clearly intended more as messages from straights to straights than an acknowledgement of queer kids in the scene. sXe scenes have never made space for queers in any consistent way, so it's no wonder that so few of us have embraced sXe as a framework for critiquing intoxication culture.[6] This is especially understandable since alcohol and drug use impact queer communities differently from punk and hardcore scenes. So let's step out of the pit for a moment and take some time to explore the ways in which intoxication culture plays out in queer culture.

Alcohol use in queer communities[7]

The reason why alcohol plays such a central role in the lives of many queer people is simple: we need to meet each other, it's not safe to meet each other in most places, and the places where we can meet almost all center around alcohol. Depending on where we live and how open we are about ourselves, most queer people in the US will face some combination of the following responses to our sexuality: physical harassment and attacks; hostility, mockery, and bullying in schools; loss of jobs and housing; rejection by family and religious communities; no access to relevant and sensitive health care and other services; refusal to recognize our relationships; lack of positive role models; indifference to our needs by authorities; exclusion from innumerable traditions, rituals, norms, and other major and subtle aspects of social life. In this atmosphere,

---

[6] By "intoxication culture," I mean the entire set of institutions and behaviors that establish alcohol drinking and drug use as community norms. The term assumes that people's decisions on whether or how much to drink or use are based not just on their individual preferences but also on our collective context of norms around intoxication and community structures that uphold them. I also want to emphasize that an individual's decision around whether and how to drink or use is not a neutral personal choice but has community-wide implications. Within this framework, use and abuse are mutually reinforcing patterns, each equally necessary to maintain the status quo.

[7] My experience as a queer guy frames my understanding of alcohol and drug use in queer communities, so my discussion is weighted towards the experiences of gay, bi and queer men. Lesbian culture differs significantly from gay/bi male culture in terms of social and sexual norms; it is also shaped by sexist oppression. These factors each change queer women's relationships to substance use. I also don't intend this article to generalize the experiences of transgender folks of various sexual orientations, since I neither identify as transgender nor do I understand all of the ways that gender identity and transphobia specifically impact substance use.

combating isolation by meeting one another is absolutely crucial, often a matter of life or death; if sober spaces don't exist, we have to find each other where we can. The oppressive social context we live in frequently results in feelings of depression, anxiety, loneliness, shame, and self-hatred, many of which we grapple with our entire lives. It's not hard to understand why many of us turn to intoxication in an effort to alleviate these intense negative emotions.

Nearly all of the major institutions of queer life in the US include alcohol consumption: bars, discos, clubs, bathhouses, drag shows, most film festivals and Pride parades, Radical Faerie and other rural gatherings... the list goes on and on. In nearly all of these spaces, alcohol provides an essential element of the socializing, the means through which we relax, come together, and build connections of friendship, romance, and sex. Apart from gay or lesbian AA meetings, very few sober spaces exist for queer people to meet each other. There are a few urban community centers; some gyms; youth groups,[8] in areas lucky enough to have them; political meetings; occasionally coffee shops or game nights – generally all low-key settings distinctly apart from the most popular and widespread nodes of queer social life. I know of an older gay man who struggled with severe alcoholism and entered AA in an attempt to regain control of his life. However, after feeling the painful loss of social affirmation and sexual possibility that resulted from staying away from the bars and parties, he decided that the disconnection from his community was too high a price to pay for sobriety and resumed drinking.

Another part of the reason why alcohol holds such a central role in queer life is because it was the first commodity ever sold to queer people *as* queer people. In seedy, often Mafia-controlled bars, we

[8] The absence of alcohol-free spaces weighs even more heavily on queer youth, who are legally excluded from most of the few venues available for us to meet outside of major cities. Since we're not allowed into most queer spaces until we're 18 or 21, many of us suffer our most intense isolation during the volatile coming-out years when we most desperately need community support and affirmation. This isolation fuels the astronomical levels of alcohol and drug use among queer youth, patterns which are often solidly in place by the time that we're legally allowed to participate in some aspects of intoxication culture. When we finally obtain access to the mysterious world of the bars and clubs, we more often than not abandon the spaces we've carved out for ourselves with other youth to soak up these new worlds and the possibilities they present.

found the first sellers willing to acknowledge us economically as a market, and thus socially as a people. The role of alcohol as the glue of gay identity originated during days of severe repression and invisibility, yet remains stubbornly persistent today as a primary linking feature of queer life. Long before the days of lesbian cruise lines and rainbow flag bumper stickers, our only link to one another economically was through alcohol, and to this day no other product cements our group identity as cohesively. As the gay liberation struggle increasingly abandoned its radical roots in the 1970s and shifted towards a more single issue gay rights approach, our collective ability to be targeted as a consumer market somehow became conflated with liberation. Ironically, gay participation in the consumer boycott of Coors beer, coordinated by gay politician Harvey Milk in mid/late 1970s San Francisco, demonstrated one of the first successful collective examples of gay consumer power when the company was forced to drop some of their discriminatory anti-gay hiring practices. Nowadays, although Coors is still a major funding force for right-wing and conservative causes, they advertise heavily in gay publications such as *The Advocate*, and they sponsor Pride festivals and LGBT lobbying groups. Is this progress?

No matter how much the alcohol companies may want us to believe that the fact that they advertise in our magazines shows the social progress we've been making, they themselves know better. They know that so long as we hate ourselves, so long as we feel crippling shame about our desires and identities, we'll keep on drinking whatever they give us to numb these feelings that we can't escape. So long as queer sex feels frightening and shameful we'll need a haze of intoxication to be able to unleash our deepest desires. These corporations have a financial interest in our continued degradation, because they know that if we actually loved ourselves - and one another - without shame, we might not need their anesthesia anymore. With alcohol in queer communities, use and abuse aren't distinct opposites but two sides of the same coin, a coin that goes into the pockets of the alcohol companies. Only when we can imagine ways to connect personally, socially and sexually without relying on alcohol will we move towards liberation.

Sex, intoxication, and internalized homophobia

One of the primary reasons why queer people drink and take drugs is to have sex. Of course, this isn't unique to queer folks - plenty of straight

folks can't get confident or relaxed enough to have sex while sober. But it takes on particular significance for queer people in the context of homophobic oppression. From as early as I can remember, queer sex was associated with deviance, disease, sin, ridicule, fear, and shame. As men, we're often told that our desires are disgusting and unnatural; queer women, are often told that their sex isn't real or meaningful, except as a fantasy for leering straight men. Until just a few years ago in the US, queer sex was illegal in many states, and there are still hardly any of us who receive useful queer-positive sex education from schools, churches, or parents.

Some of my queer friends have pointed out that if they hadn't been intoxicated during their first same-sex sexual experiences, they likely never would have been able to go through with it. I can't deny that if I hadn't already been sXe when I first became sexually active with men, intoxication might have helped me overcome some of the confusion and shame that racked my early same-sex sexual experiences. But does this mean that alcohol is a sexually liberatory force for queer people? In my opinion, no - our dependence on it merely confirms the extent to which we've internalized our oppression. I feel lot of compassion for those who make the decision to use in an effort to transcend their negative feelings - just as I feel a lot of compassion for those who, like myself, decide not to use and might subsequently miss out on realizing their desires. Still, by relying on intoxication to overcome the constraints of shyness or shame, we blur lines of consent, avoid rather than tackle the underlying issues of oppression, and frequently make unsafe sexual decisions that grievously hurt our personal and community health.

Drug use in queer communities

In my experience, drug use forms a significant part of shared gay male culture and experience, especially among those into the dancing and partying that are generally seen as the most emblematic gay activities. Lesbian/bi/queer women also use drugs at markedly higher levels than their straight counterparts. It's not hard to compute the reasons why: considering all that's been said above about social marginalization, it's a wonder that any of us escape drug dependency. The social and sexual exclusion we face as drug-free queers can feel so pronounced that I've felt at times as if my sobriety challenged or threatened my queer identity.
The centrality of drug use to gay men in the US dates back to the mid-

1970s, when widespread sexuality began to replace political engagement as the key trait characterizing a genuinely liberated gay person. In this context, using drugs to loosen up and enjoy the party, socially and sexually, assumed an unprecedented role as the facilitator of all the things that make us gay: an unquenchable thirst for life to the fullest, fabulosity, the wildest partying, and of course sex. Drug use became so universal among sexually active gay men in urban areas that in the first years of the AIDS epidemic researchers actually theorized that the horrible array of symptoms might somehow be caused by the use of poppers, a popular form of amyl nitrate inhalants. Why? Because their use formed one of the only common behavioral links between the urban gay men who formed the majority of early AIDS cases. Poppers help guys loosen up emotionally enough to let go of sexual shame and anxiety and physically enough for anal sex. But neither the tightness in our hearts nor our assholes can be relaxed through the constant application of a chemical substitute. What we really need to loosen ourselves up is to overthrow the system of heterosexist oppression that keeps us afraid, trapped in hatred for ourselves, our bodies and our desires, and unable to relate to each other while sober.

Unfortunately, the consequences of our collective difficulty to extract sexuality from intoxication can be far graver than a foggy memory the morning after. According to research studies, queer men who reported being intoxicated during sex were also more likely to engage in sexual activities with high risk for HIV transmission. Of course, this doesn't mean that intoxication causes risky sexual behavior, nor should we blame or judge folks who have sex while intoxicated. But it does mean that in order to protect our personal and community health we need to take a careful and critical look at the role that getting intoxicated plays in our sexual decision-making. In an even more frightening trend, HIV prevention workers are now finding that men are not merely getting intoxicated before having unsafe sex that they regret; some men have reported that they get intoxicated *in order to* have risky sex that they would not be comfortable with while being sober. In other words, the sexual "hang-ups" that we're overcoming through intoxication are not just shame and internalized homophobia, but safer sex messages that "hold us back" from having sex in ways that hold high risks for disease transmission. This pattern indicates the

grip of intoxication culture on our sexuality and the frightening consequences that may result until we can figure out different ways of sexually connecting to each other.

In the last decade, crystal methamphetamine has surged to the top of the list of drugs integral to gay culture. According to one study, meth use is twenty times as prevalent among men who have sex with men as among men who don't. Why are we such a vulnerable sub-population? Some of the factors involved include the drug's effects, which increase sexual arousal and lower inhibitions, alleviate stress and produce feelings of euphoria; feelings which provide vivid counterpoints to many of the negative emotions that commonly constrain gay men. As a drug counselor at the LA Gay and Lesbian Center said about meth, "It's sort of the perfect gay drug."

Wait, a perfect gay drug is one that allows us a temporary, fleeting escape from anxiety, sexual shame, and depression? What does this say about gay life? Is our gayness so defined by our internalized oppression that the drugs we use to escape it can also come to define us? Of course, many of us refuse as individuals to accept the role drugs have come to play in queer culture and identity. But until we can combine a fierce struggle against shame and queer oppression with a concerted effort to break the stranglehold of intoxication culture over queer life, we'll remain dependent on society's poisons in our attempt to escape the shame that this society has instilled in us. As the frightening correlations between having sex while intoxicated and HIV transmission show, the stakes are nothing less than our lives.

Given this complicated and painful relationship to addiction and substance use, one might expect that queer folks, especially radicals, would have a profound critique of intoxication culture and the political implications of sobriety. However, apart from a substantial movement of LGBT people in AA/NA/recovery, I've encountered few instances of such a critique. For me as a punk and an anarchist, my primary context for political critiques of intoxication culture comes from sXe. So can we queers create a space for ourselves in sXe culture? Can sXe provide a tool for queer people to transform our individual and community-level relationships to substance use?

Queer edge: Bridging the gap between queer culture and sXe

In spite of the lack of space for queer people in sXe, there are examples of individuals and bands who have attempted to forge a "queer edge" identity that blended commitment to sXe ideals with uncompromisingly queer imagery. Hugely popular and influential gay punk group Limp Wrist put out records showing vividly Xed up hands that juxtaposed sXe anthems like "This Ain't No Cross On My Hand" with distinctly queer songs like "I Love Hardcore Boys" and "Cruising at the Show." Zines such as *Total Destruction #3* drew links between queer oppression and intoxication culture from a militant vegan sXe perspective. There was at one point a queer edge website for queer sXers to link with each other. I've seen rainbow-colored patches circulating at punk shows that said "Taking the Straight out of Straight Edge." Although they're too few and far between for my liking, I'm excited to see hints of a queer edge culture emerging from the overlap between queer culture and sXe punk and hardcore scenes.

I think that sXe and queer culture have a lot to offer one another. From sXe I'd love for queer culture to absorb a sense of commitment to health, self-respect, and intentionality about lifestyle choices, as well as a sense of how individual choices can be meaningful within the context of a broader community. Queer culture can offer sXe a refusal of the machismo and gender rigidity that plagues the scene; a rejection of the false moralism of pseudo-militants; and above all, a fucking sense of humor. I would love to see a thriving queer edge scene full of bands singing righteous pro-queer, pro-sober messages, zines documenting and exploring a culture of sober queer punks, and who knows, maybe even gatherings and festivals? (Yes, this is a challenge!) But I don't know how realistic that is - I mean, how many sober queer punks are there? It may be that we're just not visible, but it's also possible that there just aren't a lot of us. So while I want to support the development of an explicitly queer edge scene - both as a pathway to link sobriety with radical queer identity, and also because I'm into gayin' up the punks however possible! - I think we need to go further. In addition to making space for queer people within punk and hardcore scenes, I want to encourage queer communities to radically challenge intoxication culture.

Towards a radical queer critique of intoxication culture

What would it take to transform queer communities towards healthier relationships with drugs, alcohol, and each other? As I see it, creating

a radical queer critique of intoxication culture within our communities provides a place from which we can begin answering that question. As a starting point, we can critically examine the past to understand the role of intoxication in our queer communities today. The dominance of drugs and alcohol in our communities has a history – how did it come about, and whose interests did it serve? And what about hidden stories of queer people who have challenged or resisted intoxication culture?[4] Having examined the past, we can shift our focus to understanding and analyzing how intoxication operates in queer communities and lives today, reinforcing our self-hatred and stifling our ability to challenge oppression. We can't rely on moralistic frameworks, which have always been used by people in power to scapegoat queer people, so this critique must be grounded in compassion and solidarity, aware of the ways that our options are constrained by the social conditions in which we operate. In my opinion, we should focus on harm reduction rather than total abstinence as an imposed norm, on creating space for sobriety as a viable and non-stigmatized choice and on promoting community health. This means setting addiction treatment and recovery as a community priority, while rejecting the individual, depoliticized alcoholism-as-illness framework.[5] Alcohol abuse is neither a moral failure nor an individual pathology; it's a response to a collective reality of oppression and the lack of social alternatives for challenging or coping with that reality. What we need are empowering models that understand addiction as a response to an oppressive society and locate the sickness in that society, not in ourselves. In the spirit of the radical queer ACT-UP activists who helped create the first needle exchange programs, we can develop treatment practices that don't rely on professionals, including supportive counseling, recovery groups, and resources coming from radical perspectives.

---

[4] For example, the largest group marching in the 1982 Gay Freedom Day Parade in San Francisco (that's what Gay Pride parades used to be called - fuck, how times have changed!) was the "Living Sober" contingent. While the AA recovery model doesn't necessarily hold a lot of radical potential, this example demonstrates queers in recovery and other sober allies asserting sobriety as a transformative choice for queer life - and not just in isolation, but in large numbers.

[5] Most books and articles about alcohol abuse by queer people frame alcoholism as an individual disease, with no analysis of how the overall structure of queer life makes drinking seem like a necessary part of life for so many of us. Defining alcoholism as an illness of individuals prevents us from accurately diagnosing the illness of intoxication culture that plagues us collectively.

In addition to supporting one another in escaping the clutches of intoxication culture, a radical queer critique can also inspire active resistance. A crucial component of this involves examining the economic structure of the alcohol industry and how its tentacles have slithered into the deepest levels of our communities. Refusing to allow alcohol and tobacco corporations to sponsor LGBT events, especially Pride festivals, and protesting them when they are featured, can be a starting point for action and for re-envisioning our relationship to intoxication and consumerism. Promoting community health includes holding accountable the agents of alcohol and drug distribution as well as the addiction profiteers outside and within our communities for the harm that their efforts produce. Realizing that the prison industrial complex offers no path towards freedom for queer people or anyone else, it's up to us to creatively find strategies to impose this accountability without relying on police, courts, and jails. These could include direct action of many kinds, exposing/shaming profiteers, organizing boycotts and divestment, public demonstrations and theatrical symbolic actions, art and "subvertisements" that mock alcohol ads, and whatever other forms of action we can devise.[3] Along with strategies of resistance that disrupt the functioning of intoxication culture, we can create viable alternatives to the alcohol and drug centered institutions of queer life. We can open up collectively run cafés, performance venues, community centers, and other social spaces that provide us with opportunities to meet without the mediation of alcohol and drugs. At conferences, gatherings, meetings, and performances, we can advocate for events to be alcohol and drug free, or organize our own counter-events and alternative gatherings side by side in order to show solidarity with sober/recovering queers Although I expect that these efforts will encounter some resistance, especially at first, I think we might be

[3] An example of creative queer resistance to intoxication culture: the radical queer group Gay Shame organized a protest when planners adopted a Budweiser beer slogan, "Be Yourself," as their official theme for the 2002 San Francisco Pride Parade. Mattilda, one of the group's founders, describes their action linking the literal poisoning of our bodies by the beer companies with their poisoning of our community celebrations with commodification and assimilationist politics: "We also created a seven-foot-tall cardboard Budweiser can that read 'Vomit Out Budweiser Pride and the Selling of Queer Identities,' and a large closet, so that people could put their patriotism back where it belonged. Just in case people wouldn't have time to reach the official Budweiser Vomitorium, we also created official Gay Shame vomit bags, which described our three primary targets: the consumerism, blind patriotism and assimilationist agenda of the Pride Parade."

surprised by how receptive queers will be to create alternatives to the drunk, high, or tweaked consensus forced on most queer events and spaces.[1] At two different radical queer & trans gatherings I attended in the southeast US over the past years, workshops discussing the role of substance use and abuse in our communities were very well attended, passionately debated, and widely praised and appreciated. Even just starting conversations about drugs and alcohol can produce positive shifts in our shared queer culture, as we become increasingly aware of the importance of our collective struggles around intoxication.

These struggles *are* important: transforming our collective relationship to drugs and alcohol forms a crucial component of the struggle for queer liberation and self-determination. In his classic essay "Refugees from Amerika: A Gay Manifesto," Carl Wittman argues, "To be a free territory, we must govern ourselves, set up our own institutions, defend ourselves, and use our won energies to improve our lives." Applying this logic to the appalling rates of addiction and substance abuse in queer communities, I believe that breaking the stranglehold of intoxication culture among queer people is a necessary step towards self-governing and self-defending communities. As xDonx writes in *Total Destruction #3*, "Us queers can never rely on straight people for support or defense, and it's about fucking time we stopped drowning in their poisons."

Framing recovery from addiction, creation of queer sober space, and queer challenges to the status quo of intoxication culture as matters of community self-defense emphasizes the political and not just personal dimensions of intoxication and sobriety. Sobriety is not the same as freedom, nor does substance use equal slavery. However, I do believe that destroying the conditions of oppression that make sobriety difficult to impossible for most queers, and hence making sobriety a viable alternative, is a precondition for our collective freedom.
Above all, a radical queer critique of intoxication culture would insist that nothing short of a fundamental transformation in our society will bring liberation for queer people - and everyone else. It would

[1] At a 2006 radical queer & trans gathering I helped to organize in North Carolina, we made the controversial decision to keep the space for the entire weekend of workshops, meals, and performances completely drug and alcohol free. To our surprise, nearly all of the participants expressed appreciation and mentioned that the atmosphere felt more respectful and less intensely sexualized; many felt safer than they had almost ever in queer spaces before, and found that their perspectives on the role of drugs and alcohol in queer scenes had been radically altered.

recognize the ways that intoxication culture impacts queer people differently along lines of gender, race, orientation, class, and other axes of identity. Understanding how our whole selves include multiple overlapping identities, it would recognize how only an active struggle to abolish all forms of oppression can sew the seeds of a world in which we can experience genuine self-determination. Therefore our strategies for confronting intoxication culture must not only challenge homo/transphobia and heterosexism but also white supremacy, capitalism, patriarchy, and the power of the state. Whatever tools we use - punk, sXe, music, direct action, queer sex, etc. - the time to act is now. Breaking the shackles of addiction and dependency can free up our energies for the revolutionary struggles we need to break the shackles of oppression and misery - we've got a long way to go, so let's not waste a moment being wasted!

You can get in touch with the author via email at xriotfagx@riseup.net

Zine created and distributed by
WARZONE DISTRO
xtheferalspacex@riseup.net
facebook.com/theferalspace
Anti-Copyright 2014